
*Account of the COURTSHIPS and MARRIAGES of the Natives of
Kamtschatka, a Part of the Russian Dominions, by a Person
who has resided among them.*

WHEN a Kamtschadale resolves to marry, he looks about for a bride in some of the neighbouring villages, seldom in his own; and when he finds one to his mind, he discovers his inclination to the parents, desiring that he may have the liberty of serving them for some time: this permission he easily obtains, and

during his service he shews an uncommon zeal, in order to satisfy them of what he can do. After having thus served, he desires liberty to seize his bride, and if he happens to please the parents, his bride, and her relations, this is presently granted; but if they disapprove of it, they give him some small reward for his services, and

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he departs. It sometimes happens, that these bridegrooms, without discovering any thing of their intentions, engage themselves in service in some strange village; and though every one suspects their design, yet no notice is taken of them, till either he or his friends declare it.

When a bridegroom obtains the liberty of seizing his bride, he seeks every opportunity of finding her alone, or in the company of a few people, for during this time all the women in the village are obliged to protect her; besides, she has two or three different coats, and is swaddled round with fish nets and straps, so that she has little more motion than a statue. If the bridegroom happens to find her alone, or in company with but a few, he throws himself upon her, and begins to tear off her clothes, nets, and straps; for to strip the bride naked seems to constitute the ceremony of marriage. This is not always an easy task, for though she herself makes small resistance, (and indeed she can make but little) yet, if there happen to be many women near, they all fall upon the bridegroom without any mercy, beating him, dragging him by the hair, scratching his face, and using every other method they can think of to prevent him from accomplishing his design. If the bridegroom is so happy as to obtain his wish, he immediately runs from her, and the bride, as a proof of her being conquered, calls him back with a tender voice: thus the marriage is concluded. This victory is seldom obtained at once; and after every attempt the bridegroom is obliged to take some time to recover his strength, and to cure the wounds he has received. There was an instance of one, who, after having persevered for seven years, instead of obtaining a bride, was rendered quite a cripple, the women having used him so barbarously.

As soon as the above ceremony is over, he has liberty next night to go to her bed, and the day following, without any ceremony, carries her off to his own village. After some time the bride and bridegroom return to the bride's relations, where the marriage is celebrated in the following manner, of which I was an eye-witness in 1739.

The bridegroom, his friends, and his wife, visited his father-in-law in three boats, and the men, being naked, pushed them along with poles. About one hundred paces from the village to which they were going they landed, began to sing, and used conjurations with tow fastened upon a rod, muttering something over the head of a dried fish, which they wrapped in the tow, and gave to an old woman to hold. The conjuration being over, they put upon the bride a coat of sheep's-skin, and tied four images about her: thus loaded she had difficulty to move. They went again into their boats, and came up to the village, where they landed a second time; at this landing-place a boy of the village met them, and led the bride by the hand, all the women following.

When the bride came to the hut, they tied a strap round her, by which she was let down the stairs, the old woman who carried the head of the fish going before her; she laid down the head of the fish at the foot of the stairs, where it was trodden upon by the bride and bridegroom, and all the people present, and then thrown into the fire.

All the strangers took their places, having first stripped the bride of her superfluous ornaments. The bridegroom heated the hut, and dressed the victuals which they had brought with them, and entertained the inhabitants of the village. The next day the landlord entertained the strangers with great superfluity, who on the third day departed.

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departed; the bride and bridegroom only remained to work some time with their father. The superfluous dress which was taken from the bride was distributed among the relations, who were obliged to return them presents of far greater value.

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